

# Ghosts Make Good Detectives

**W**hich shall now turn to some cases which were seen clearly ultramundane in their nature, and I would express my obligation to Mr. Harold Furber, whose care has restored many details to his collection of criminal records.

The first which I would choose is the murder of Sergeant Davies in the Highlands in the year 1740.

Davies was part of the English garrison left in the north after the suppression of Prince Charlie's rising, and like many of his comrades he alleviated his exile by the excellent sport which the barren country afforded. Upon September 22 in this year he went shooting near Braemar without any attendant. The rancor of the recent war had to some extent died down, and in any case the Sergeant, who was a determined man, feared no opponent.

**T**HE result showed, however, that he was overbold, as he never returned from his expedition. Search parties were sent out, but months passed and there was still no sign of the missing soldier. Five years passed and the mystery was still unsolved. At the end of that time, two Highlanders, Duncan Terig and Alex Bain Macdonald, were arrested because the fowling-piece and some of the property of the lost man were found in their possession. The case rested mainly, however, upon some evidence which was as strange as any ever heard in a court of law.

A farm laborer named Alex Macpherson, aged twenty-six, deposed that one night in the summer of 1750—that is, some nine months after the Sergeant's disappearance, he was lying awake in the barn where all the servants slept, when he saw enter a man dressed in blue who came to his bedside and beckoned him to follow. Outside the door the figure turned and said, "I am Sergeant Davies." The apparition then pointed to a distant moss or swamp, and said: "You will find my bones there. Go and bury them at once, for I can have no peace: now will I give you say, until my bones are buried; you may get Donald Farquharson to help you." It then vanished.

Early next day Macpherson, according to his own account, went to the place indicated and, obeying the exact instructions received, he came straight upon the body, still wearing the blue regimental coat of Guise's Horse. Macpherson laid it upon the surface, dragging it out from the slime, but did not bury it. A few nights later the vision appeared to him once more as he lay in the barn and reproached him with having failed to carry out the instructions given. Macpherson asked, "Who murdered you?" To this the apparition answered, "Duncan Terig and Alex Macdonald," and vanished once more. Macpherson next day went to Farquharson and asked him to come and help bury the body, to which the latter agreed. It was accordingly done. No one else was told of the incident save only one friend, John Rowan, who was informed within two days of the burial.

**T**HIS story was certainly open to criticism, as the arrest was in 1754 and the alleged apparition and subsequent burial in 1750, so that one would naturally ask why no information had been given during four years.



## True Ghost Stories-IV By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

### *The Burial of Sergeant Davies The Miller's Midnight Visitor The Murder of Eugene Dupont*

On the other hand, one could imagine that these Celtic Highlanders were somewhat in the position of Irish peasants in an agrarian outrage. They were bound together against a common enemy, and would not act save under pressure. This pressure arrived when the two suspects were actually arrested, the murdered man's gear was found upon them, and direct inquiry was made from the folk in the neighborhood. No ill-will was shown to exist between Macpherson and the accused men, nor was any motive alleged for so extraordinary a concoction.

On the psychic side there are also some objections. One would have conceived that the Sergeant might return, as others seem to have done, in order to identify his murderers, but in this case that was a secondary result, and the main one appears to have been the burial of his own remains. Spirits are not much concerned about their own bodies. In a communication which I saw recently the deceased alluded to his body as "that thing that I used to go about in." Still, earthly prejudices die hard, and if Davies, sprung from a decent stock, yearned for a decent burial, it would surely not be an unnatural thing.

**T**HERE was some corroboration for Macpherson's weird story. There were female quarters in this barn, and a woman worker named Isabel Mackenzie

deposed that on the second occasion of the apparition she saw "something naked come in at the door and go straight to Macpherson's bed, which frightened her so much that she drew the clothes over her head." She added that when it appeared it came in a bowing posture, but she could not tell what it was. The next morning she asked Macpherson what it was that had troubled them the night before, and he answered that she might be easy, for it would trouble them no more.

There is a discrepancy here between the blue-coated figure of the first vision and the "something naked" of the second, but the fact remained that the woman claimed to have seen something alarming, and to have uttered to it next day. Macpherson, however, could speak nothing but Gaelic, his evidence being interpreted to the Court.

Lockhart, the defending barrister, naturally asked in what tongue the vision spoke, to which Macpherson answered, "In as good Gaelic as ever I heard in Lockhart."

"Pretty good for the ghost of an English sergeant," said Lockhart, and this facile retort made the Court laugh and finally brought about the acquittal of the prisoners, in spite of the more material proofs which could not be explained away. Later, both Lockhart and the Advocate admitted their belief in the guilt of their clients.

**A**S a matter of fact Davies had fought at Culloden in April, 1746, and met his end in September, 1749, so that he had been nearly three and a half years in the Highlands, mixing in sport with the gillies, and it is difficult to suppose that he could not master a few simple sentences of their language. But apart from that, although our information shows that knowledge

has to be acquired by personal effort, and not by miracle in the after life, still it is to be so acquired, and if Sergeant Davies saw that it was only in a Gael that he would find those rare psychic gifts which would enable him to appear and to communicate (for every spirit manifestation must have a material basis), then it is not incredible that he would master the means during the ten months or so which elapsed before his reappearance.

Presuming that Macpherson's story is true, it by no means follows that he was the medium, since are one of the sleepers in the barn might have furnished that nameless atmosphere which provides the correct conditions. In all such cases it is to be remembered that this atmosphere is rare and that a spirit comes back not as it would or when it would but as it can. Law, inexorable law, still governs every fresh unmet which we add to our knowledge, and only by defining and recognising the limitations will we gain some dim perception of the conditions of the further life and its relation to the present one.

**W**E now pass to a case where the spirit interposition seems to have been as clearly proved as anything could be. It was, it is true, some time ago, but full records are still available.

In the year 1612 a yeoman named John Walker lived at the village of Great Lumley, some miles north of Durham. A cousin named Anne Walker kept house for him, and intimacy ensued with the prospect of the usual result.

John Walker greatly feared the scandal, and took disinclined steps to prevent (Continued on page 88)

